



## “Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth”

Sponsored by the US Agency for International Development and  
the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria

### STRATEGY

#### FOR CARRYING OUT OF PUBLIC HEARINGS ON THE NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLANS

***The purpose of the Strategy*** is to give the main guidelines for carrying out of public hearings on the management plans for the Rila and Central Balkan National Parks. Those are the country’s first institutionalized management plans to be approved by the Council of Ministers and to be implemented in accordance with the Protected Areas Act and the Regulation on Protected Area Management Planning.

The Rila and Central Balkan National Parks have been in existence for approximately ten years. Significant work has been carried out during this period for their studying, development of the concept of their management, establishment of a community of experts contributing toward biodiversity conservation, raising the public awareness of the values of nature and the principles of nature management etc. However, the institutional management of the parks was started after the adoption of the Protected Areas Act in 1998 formulating and regulating the establishment of the National Park Directorates as regional institutions of the Ministry of Environment and Waters. The same act makes provisions of the introduction of management plans as a main strategic tool for the implementation of the nature conservation policy in protected area management.

So far several protected area management plans have been elaborated in the country, but neither was adopted and legalized in accordance with the current legislation. What is more, attempts have been made to conduct public hearings on the issues of biodiversity conservation such as the Protected Areas Act, the boundaries of National Parks and the implementation of EIA procedures.

Therefore, this strategy is the first attempt at establishing the basis of the policy for consultation of the protected area management plans with the interested parties and with the partners at the national and regional levels.

***The context*** of the strategy is set by the experience of the teams in the Rila and Central Balkan NP Directorates which work with their partners and maintain dialog with the institutions and communities around the parks. The carrying out of such hearings will be a contribution to the future successful implementation of the management plans based on the existing mutual relations with all those who have vested interest to the areas in and around the national parks. Also the socio-economic results and analyses conducted during the last three years for the purposes of management planning will be used in the preparation and carrying out of public hearings.

The public hearing context shall be determined mainly by the substance and functions of the national park management plans. The Protected Areas Act and its Regulation do not define clearly the purpose and the functions of the management plan. However, the provisions of those two documents outline its role of a ten-year strategic plan setting the policy and also the regimes, norms and actions leading to achieving the purposes of management provided for under Article 18 of the PAA. In this manner the management plans receive the dual role of acting as strategic documents for the management policy and also as regulatory documents for the direct implementation of the PAA.

It is this specific feature of the management plans that in fact creates the precedent of a direct public hearing on the state policy for biodiversity conservation in national parks and, simultaneously, on the manner of implementation of the act. This fact is largely determining the directions and the main principles of this Strategy. ***The purpose of the public hearing*** is, in fact, twofold – to inform about the policy and to generate public support for it on one hand and to receive feedback concerning the possibilities for efficient implementation of the management norms and regimes on the other.

***The legal framework*** for elaboration and adoption of management plans is set by the Protected Areas Act. The Regulation on Protected Area Management Planning was adopted as its subsidiary law. It regulates the requirements and rules for carrying out of public hearings for the management plans prior to their deposition for revision by the authorities of the Ministry of Environment and Waters and the Council of Ministers.

The mandatory procedures and deadlines are set forth as well as the institutions responsible for the carrying out of each procedure. The obligations and rights of the “Contractor” – the institution entrusted with the elaboration of management plans – and those of the Ministry of Environment and Waters are outlined clearly. There are no explicit requirements regarding the role of the National Park Directorates and, therefore, its describing in this Strategy is necessary. Also, there is no explicit regulation of the specific role and function of the Ministry of Environment and Waters apart from the fact that it accepts the results, makes decisions on the proposals and is, therefore, entitled and obligated to assume responsibility for the content of the management plan following its official submission by the Contractor.

It is clear that the Contractor not only has the task of organizing but also of conducting the public hearings. It is the Contractor’s obligation to propose to the Ministry of Environment and Waters a draft of the plan for revision by the Higher Council of Environmental Experts. The role of the Ministry of Environment and Waters during the preparation and the carrying out of the public hearing is that of an observer. Its role, its rights and obligations, arise following the completion of those procedures. In fact, the Ministry makes the final decision about the particular draft of the management plan that will be submitted for reviewing by the Higher Council of Environmental Experts and, subsequently, to the Council of Ministers. Obviously, the role of the National Park Directorates should be to act as hosts of the process and of the event. At the same time, however, the responsibility for the content of the draft management plan proposed for the hearing lies entirely with the ‘Contractor’. Assisted by the Contractor, the Directorate prepares the conditions for the public hearing, introduces the Contractor, and answers questions regarding the future implementation of the management plan. However, it still does not demonstrate responsibilities regarding the content of the management plan but rather prepares its own opinion regarding the plan and prepares to participate in its adoption.

Rules on the Organization and the Activities of the National Park Directorates approved by the Minister of Environment and Waters.

Article 4. The Directorates shall:

1. Participate in the elaboration of management plans (MP), and structuring and technical plans and projects, by:
  - 1.1. Elaborating and submitting to the MoEW proposals for funding of plans and projects;
  - 1.2. Assigning the elaboration of technical projects for the implementation of supporting or regeneration activities, envisaged in the MP and structuring plans;
  - 1.3. Providing the available information needed for the elaboration of plans and projects;
  - 1.4. Preparing statements on the plans and projects and participating in their approval.

Decree No. 7 of February 8, 2000 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, Regulation on Protected Area Management Planning.

Article 12. (1) Subject to compulsory public hearing shall be drafts of management plans for national and nature parks and maintained reserves.

Article 13. The public hearings under Article 12, paragraphs 1 and 2, shall be organized by the Contractors, who shall:

1. declare at least 20 days in advance the date, time, location and scope of public hearing, as well as the location at which the draft is available for those interested in one central newspaper and in the local mass media;
2. display announcements with the data under item 1 in visible locations in the relevant municipalities in within the same deadline;
3. notify in writing the interested central authorities, the scientific and academic institutions of the circumstances under item 1 within the same deadline.

Article 14. (1) The Contractors shall:

1. submit to the public hearing the draft management plan and keep minutes of the opinions, remarks and recommendations;
2. reflect into the draft the expedient remarks and recommendations;
3. draw up motivated information on the comments and recommendations unaccounted for and notify of this the relevant persons within one month of the public hearing;
4. attach to the draft the minutes of the public hearing and the information on the comments unaccounted for;
5. send copies of the minutes and the information to the Ministry of Environment and Waters within one month of the public hearing.

(2) The persons under paragraph 1, item 3 may object in writing to the Minister of Environment and Waters, who shall make a final statement within one month regarding the expediency of the remarks unaccounted for and shall notify of this the relevant persons and the Customer, respectively, the Contractor. The Customer shall take the statement of the Ministry of Environment and Waters into consideration.

***The guidelines*** for planning and carrying out of public hearings are set forth by the provisions of the law, by the existing experience and by the objectives and functions of the national park management plans.

1. The public hearings of the National Park Management Plans are more than a one-time event. The regulations require a period of three weeks during which free access should be provided to the documents and that a documented event be held where opinions and statements are expressed publicly. In fact, the conditions and the provisions require public hearing preparation, carrying out and following-up much broader in scope and content. Obviously, it makes more sense that public hearings should be regarded not as single events but as rigorously planned processes. The objective of this process is to address all institutions and groups with vested interests in the area in and around the national parks and to discuss their interests, as well as to obtain their support for the implementation of the management plans.
2. The management plan public hearing process is based on complete clarity and transparency regarding the management intentions of the National Park Directorate. Any attempt to conceal the specific regimes and norms and the manner of their implementation would lead to serious difficulties in their subsequent implementation. The principles of introduction of management zones in the park, the manner of obtaining rights for sustainable use of resources in the park and the obligations of the Park Directorate to enforce the policy of the state will be clearly explained.
3. The public hearings will be conducted in the spirit of positive campaigning. The regimes and 'restrictions', and the possibilities are explained in parallel. This relates to the possibilities for participatory implementation of the park management principles. These principles ensure the participation of groups of the population around the national parks in the direct management of protected areas based on shared benefits. They receive the right to use the natural resources in the park (through forms of ecotourism for visitors in their settlements or by direct extraction of non-timber natural products) in keeping with the regimes and norms of the management plan. This allows them to gain economic benefits. At the same time, however, they participate directly in the monitoring of natural resources, the conservation of ecosystems and protection against fire. The explanation of these principles clearly establishes a positive quality of the entire campaign.
4. The management plan public hearings are conducted in such a way that they combine the provision of information and the generation of feedback or reaction regarding the norms and regimes envisioned in the management plans. The purpose is that the authors of the management plans and the Park Directorates should receive as accurate and clear ideas about the attitude of the stakeholders towards the contents of the management plans as possible.

***Main stages*** of public hearing preparation and carrying out:

***1. Creation of a general positive attitude and atmosphere***

The objective of this stage is to inform or to remind the general public about the existence of national parks, about the importance of biodiversity conservation, about the international significance of the parks, about the possibilities for economic prosperity of the population around the parks. In general, a period of intensive 'broadcasting' of the main messages of the park underlying their entire public awareness strategies are referred to.

This stage may last for one or two months depending on the specific activities of the park or at the national level. Meetings and activities are conducted with various partner groups depending on the specific occasions – press conferences, presentations, holidays, distribution of publications, ceremonies etc. The period is dominated by positive messages but serious attention is paid to the element of education not only about the value of nature in the parks, but also about how they are managed, what the management plans represent, what is the benefit for the people living near the parks, etc.

In particular, concerning the public hearings of the Rila and Central Balkan NP management plans, this preliminary campaign is carried out as presentation of the publication “The Green Gold of Bulgaria” at the national and regional levels. A ceremony is held in Sofia to announce the launching of the book and to present it for distribution via the Bulgarian missions abroad and its distribution in the country. The ceremony and the smaller events connected to it are accompanied by a broad media campaign distributing the messages of nature conservation.

## **2. Preparation**

A/ Preparation of Handouts: Several types of handouts are prepared for the public hearings:

- ✓ *Question and answer leaflets* whose purpose is to provide general information about the intentions of management as set in the management plans and orientation for a broad circle of people living in the areas around the national parks. They are written in a popular language. The statements written there are brief and laconic. In fact, they answer the most frequent questions such as: Will picnics into the area be allowed and under what conditions; will gathering of herbs and mushrooms be allowed; where will grazing be allowed; will there be entry fees for the park, etc. The leaflets utilize a simplified design with one or two colors so that they can be multiplied easily and inexpensively, preferably on a copier or printer. It is recommended that a series of such leaflets should be issued on various subjects such as tourism and park visitors, direct uses of natural resources, the opportunities for education and scientific research, and cultural and historical heritage. A general section providing summarized information about the values of the park and about certain aspects of administrative management should be part of each leaflet. These will be presented to the citizens who visit the park offices during the period prior to the public hearing and during the hearing itself. They will be prepared jointly by the Contractor’s team and by the Park Directorate team. It is believed that the entire process of the public hearing would need not more than 300 copies of each. The specific content and print run will be discussed and decided upon during the meetings for orientation and preparation with the Park Directorates and with the section Chief Inspectors.
- ✓ *Summary of the Management Plan*. The purpose of this summary is to present the contents of the management plan - the main rationale for the proposed management principles and regimes and the specific management intentions. It contains a brief summary of the descriptive section, a summary of the evaluation of the significance and of the threats, and, almost entirely, the management objectives and regimes and norms described in the zoning of the park. The programs and the projects are presented only in summary for information. The summary of the management plan is presented to persons, institutions and organizations which are expected to make official statements regarding the management plan. It is also the main material for the focal meetings which are envisioned to take place during the three-week period required by the Regulation. An adequate print run for the public hearings is 200 copies.

- ✓ *Maps* by sections and of the entire park with markings for the management zone areas. Their recommended scale is 1:50,000 and they should depict the proposed management zones in the respective park sections.
- ✓ *Posters* notifying the population from the urban centers around the park about the ongoing public hearing and for the specific topical meetings and the official hearing. They should use a common design and should allow entering of specific information. Approximately 200 copies will be sufficient for each park.
- ✓ *Available materials* – the existing leaflets and brochures as well as calendars, books, post-cards etc.

B/ Conducting orientation and preparation workshops for the park staff. The workshops are conducted separately for each park. Their duration is 3 days on average. The specialists from the park directorates and the section Chief Inspectors participate.

The purpose of the workshops is to prepare for the public hearings. This preparation has three aspects:

- orientation (training) of the directorate staff - on the management plan content and on possible cases;
- development of the concept and of the contents of the handouts to be used during the public hearings;
- elaboration of an action plan.

All participants have received the complete text of the management plans earlier and have had several days to become acquainted with it. The Contractor's team has prepared an exemplary draft of the handouts to be discussed during the workshop. The questions and answers, whose inclusion in the Questions and Answers leaflets is important, are clarified. Specific cases are developed.

An action plan is elaborated, including:

- the arranging of the park offices as reception offices for the public hearing period; where possible, the National Park Exhibition is displayed (all three copies of the exhibition are used in parallel);
- planning for meetings with particular institutions during the first week of the open reception offices;
- planning for specific activities of the reception rooms in the park offices;
- determining the subjects for the focal groups by sections;
- allocation of specific responsibilities among the specialists from the directorate;
- specifying of the manner of use of various types of materials;
- a plan for the accompanying media campaign;
- elaboration of a schedule and allocation of particular responsibilities.

### ***3. Period of Operation of the Reception Rooms***

During the three-week period required by the regulations, reception rooms are established in the National Park Directorate offices and the park section offices. A reception offices is opened in a suitable location in Sofia. The requirement is that the public should have access to the proposed management plans in specific locations. In reality, the reception sections opened for three weeks will be the first ‘hosts’ for expression of opinions and for asking of clarifying questions.

Three types of activities are carried out during this three-week period: visits in municipalities and specific institutions, operation of the reception offices, focal groups.

During the first week, *members of the Contractor’s team and representatives of the Directorate will visit specific institutions* for preliminary orientation and for invitation for participation in the focal groups, as well as in the official public hearing. The focal groups are planned during the public hearings preparation workshop. During those workshops the prepared hand-outs are presented, specific issues in the management plans are explained, feedback is encouraged. The opinions expressed during those meetings, which are not recorded as written statements or are not presented officially to the public hearing, will not be taken into consideration. The number of those meetings is limited – not more than one per park section.

The following materials will be available in the reception offices: a complete copy of the management plan, copies of the management plan summary (10 on average); questions and answers leaflets (50 of each on average); a map of the section depicting the management zones by section or the entire park; other park-related materials.

*The reception offices will be open for visitors for three weeks*, three times in the week for two hours distributed between the days in the different hours of the day. During these hours, the section chief experts, the members of the Contractor’s team and, possibly, one representative of the Park Directorate will be present in the offices. The reception hours are time for every visitor to obtain papers, to ask questions and to receive answers, and to become acquainted with the full text of the management plan. Visitors may actually submit their written statements that could be read during the public hearing.

Visit registration notebooks will be opened in each reception office. The names and institutions of the visitors will be recorded. The questions asked will be written down in the notebooks. The opinions of the visitors regarding the reception offices and the management plans will be recorded if so desired by the visitors. However, it will be declared clearly that the opinions presented during the reception hours that are not presented as official written statements and not deposited during the day of the official public hearing will not be followed up. A report based on those notebooks will be submitted during the public hearing. Positive statements will be generated by means of conversations and discussions with specific people and institutions visiting the reception offices.

*Focal groups* will be organized by the Contractor jointly with the Directorate and in accordance with pre-determined subjects, they will be announced in advance, specific participants will be invited, but the groups will be opened for all who would like to attend. The focal groups are discussion meetings with a dual purpose – clarification of specific issues and positions in the management intentions contained in the management plan, as well as receiving a preliminary feedback on the expected views on those positions. The focal groups are conducted on behalf of the Contractor, hosted by the National Park and with a professional fa-

cilitator. Minute will be kept but it will be stipulated that the opinions expressed by the participants and not received as specific proposals as well as opinions during the official hearing will not be followed up. The focal groups will be convened during the second half of the three-week period.

The following subjects based on the programs and projects in the management plans are proposed in advance: for the regions of park sections Sapareva Bania, Samokov and Kostenets in Rila NP and Karlovo in the Central Balkan NP – ecotourism development opportunities based upon the National Park; for the park sections Yakoruda and Belovo in the Rila NP and Klisura in the Central Balkan NP – opportunities for management of park resources of the NP in co-operation and with the participation of the population from the region. It would be well to make provisions for the subjects of the educational and interpretative programs of the park, for management of the treeless zone in the Central Balkan and for the water resources in Rila in suitable locations.

The offices of the parks may be visited by citizens with questions regarding the management plans outside the declared hours and focal group meetings. It is recommended that those citizens should not be returned and that they should be recorded in the visitor book, but the only thing they can receive during this time (outside the announced hours) should be printed materials. It is recommended that during these three weeks duty should be initiated in order to ensure the operation of the park offices during the normal working hours.

The specific activities for the opening of the reception offices will be: elaboration of an action plan for each office, preparation of materials, publication of announcements and posting of placards, sending of letters notifying the interested institutions, preparation of schedules for the presence and participation of representatives of the Contractor's team and of the Park Directorate.

#### **4. Public Hearing**

The public hearings required as events under the Protected Areas Act are conducted after the expiration of the three-week period in the towns where the respective National Park Directorate is located.

*The Contractor's role.* The overall organization will be undertaken by the Contractor's team. The Contractor's team will provide a professional facilitator. It would be well if this facilitator knows well both the management plans and the legal provisions in order to know whom to direct the incoming questions to. The management plan presentation, required by the Regulation, will be made by a representative of the team. The answers of questions related to the envisioned management regimes or the rationale of the respective management intentions will be provided by the Contractor's team. The representatives of the team will also answer various questions aimed at clarifying the meaning of the contents of the management plan.

It is the Contractor's responsibility to provide the necessary facilities for recording of the event and for taking of minutes. The Contractor's team will provide minutes of the event and will make the respective amendments of the management plan, and will write information about the accepted or rejected proposals. The Contractor is obliged to notify the authors within one month about the proposals which he has not accepted for the management plan and to provide his rationale.



The Contractor will submit to the Ministry of Environment and Waters the re-worded management plan with the Minutes of the Public Hearing, along with a note about the proposals that are not recorded.

*The role of the National Park Directorate.* The National Park Directorate is the host of the public hearing. The Director will open the event and introduce the Contractor's team and the reasons for the holding of the public hearing. The Director will explain the procedures and the rules. During the hearing, representatives of the Directorate answer questions related to the future planning (annual action plans), the management plan implementation procedures and the future possibilities for participation in the park management. All questions related to the regulatory framework or to the administration of the park also receive answers from representatives of the Park Directorate.

*The role of the Ministry of Environment and Waters.* During the public hearing, the representatives of the Ministry of Environment and Waters will have the role of supervisors. From the very beginning they are represented by the National Park Director. Since the Act and the regulation entrust the MoEW to make a decision on the proposed draft, it would be inappropriate for its representatives to express official or unofficial statements on raised issues during the public hearing. The representatives of the MoEW may be asked to answer questions for clarification of the law or the regulation and for the procedures following the submission of the management plan by the Contractor.

#### Specific logistical actions

- The public hearing will be held in a hall seating no less than fifty – seventy people. In Gabrovo an appropriate location is the building of the Municipal Council, and in Blagoevgrad – Alen Mak hotel or the Conference hall of one of the two universities.
- The members of the Contractor's team and of the National Park have allocated their roles among themselves and the accommodation of guests in order to register all people present as soon as they enter the hall.
- A tape player is provided and, where possible, video recording and a stenographer for shorthand recording.
- An exhibition dedicated to the national parks is displayed in the lobby and all materials prepared for the public hearing are presented.
- There is an illustrating map of the park and the management zones in the hall.
- The public hearing lasts for not more than two hours and a half including the opening and closing. Rules for the statements are introduced – not more than ten minutes for statements, not more than three minutes for questions and the same for answers, not more than one statement per an organization or person.
- The minutes is processed no later than two days after the conducting of the public hearing.

#### **5. Follow Up Activities**

All follow up activities are the responsibility of the Contractor. They include:

- Processing of the stenographic records – up to two days from the public event.

- Discussion of the proposals and decision made jointly with the Park Directorate on their inclusion in the management plan – ten days from the public hearing.
- Drawing up of the draft management plan for submitting to the MoEW – twenty days following the public hearing.
- Preparation of the minutes and of the information about the rejected proposals and deposition at the MoEW – twenty five days from the public hearing.
- Dispatching of notification letters to the authors of proposals not reflected in the management plan – thirty days from the public hearing.

### ***Schedule of Activities***

The preparation and carrying out of the activities for both parks is consecutive with a difference of two weeks.

#### *Exemplary schedule for the Rila National Park*

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Contractor</i>
Preparation of a final draft MP following the MoEW	By 15.01	ARD, NP
Preparation of the maps	January	ARD
Preliminary draft of the questions and answers	January	ARD
Preliminary draft summary of the MP	January	ARD
Conducting of a preliminary campaign	January	NP, ARD
Orientation workshop	By January 30	NP, ARD
Final drafts of the Summary and questions and answers	By February 10	ARD
Announcements, invitation letters	By February 15	NP, ARD
Three weeks for reception offices	By March 5	NP, ARD
Public Hearing	March 5-10	NP, ARD
Submission of the revised draft MP to the MoEW	By April 10	ARD